

# The Register-Guard

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## **Eugene and Lane County planning now for influx of visitors during 2021 IAAF World Championships**

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There's lots to arrange before summer 2021, when one of the largest sporting events in the world lands in Eugene

Eugene and Lane County are in full planning mode to welcome hundreds of thousands of visitors and their spending money to Eugene in August 2021 for one of the largest sporting events in the world.

The International Association of Athletics Federations World Track & Field Championships, coming to the United States for the first time, will draw an expected 2,000 athletes from as many as 214 countries, upwards of 50,000 daily visitors and potentially more than 3,000 media members and 4,000 volunteers to the area over the course of about 10 days.

It's estimated the event, also known as Oregon21, will bring \$205 million to the area, according to a 2015 study.

From police security and emergency response plans to tourist arrangements and community enhancement projects, the city of Eugene, including the Eugene Police Department, TrackTown USA, Travel Lane County and countless other agencies already have been working for months to prepare for the influx of visitors, with Hayward Field at the center of it all.

Even sooner than Oregon21, Eugene will have dress rehearsal in June 2020 when the University of Oregon and the city host the 2020 Olympic Track and Field Trials.

There's one major hiccup, though: The space where it's all set to take place at the corner of 15th Avenue and Agate Street on the UO campus is currently a construction zone.

The old track and field stadium at Hayward Field, or what's left of it, was demolished in June 2018 and is in the process of being completely reconstructed with more than 300 craftspeople working on the project at any given time.

And while the reconstruction isn't set to be finished until spring 2020, preparations for the coming track and field events are well underway.

Oregon21, a subsidiary of TrackTown USA, is the local organizing committee and nonprofit organization tasked with putting on the event in conjunction with USA Track and Field, the sport's governing body in the United States.

Oregon21 is working with the city of Eugene and other communities and agencies across the state to "welcome the world" in 2021 and ensure "the delivery of a world-class event that will have a lasting, positive impact on our community," according to the Oregon21 website. A representative from Oregon21 did not respond to requests for comment for this story.

Although specific details have not been nailed down yet, organizers do know that the events are expected to have a huge economic impact on the state. Oregon21 alone is expected to generate an estimated \$52 million in visitor spending and \$205 million in total economic impact during the event, according to a study completed by ECONorthwest.

The consulting firm was hired by TrackTown USA to complete the economic benefit projection to help sell the Legislature on the event's contributions to the state and gain public funding.

Local organizers for Oregon21 supplied a budget of \$85 million for the world championships, with most of that money — \$51 million — coming from sponsorships, public funds and nonprofit grants.

Former Gov. John Kitzhaber endorsed TrackTown's request for \$40 million in state funds in 2014, but TrackTown pared that request to \$25 million when pushing for the lodging tax increase from 1 percent to 1.8 percent in

2016.

With an opportunity to boost Oregon's economy and draw international attention to the area, the city of Eugene is taking full advantage of the ways it can leverage the event to "better serve the people who live here and better represent cultures of Eugene," according to Stephanie Scafa, the city's project lead for the Oregon 21 event.

### **Improvement catalyst**

Scafa said the city's goal is to use existing plans and policies to support the event that also benefit the Eugene community in the long run.

"We're using this as a catalyst for projects that we've had in the works for a while that we haven't done," Scafa said. "Projects like the riverfront expansion efforts, downtown revitalization and city safety. We want the event to have a lasting impact on the world and also better our community long-term."

Other projects the city is working to complete include the 20X21 Mural project, which aims to put up 20 murals across the Eugene area by the 2021 event. The new \$14 million downtown Riverfront Park installment is also on the list, as well as the planting of 2,021 giant sequoias around town.

The trees will be planted in shared public areas such as parks and street medians, as well as private spaces like schools, local businesses and homes to "boost the area's urban forest and turn hosting the championships into a more sustainable opportunity for the southern Willamette Valley," according to the city website.

The city, along with several other agencies, also will play a role in more logistical undertakings as part of planning for the events, such as water, energy and building out the event itself, Scafa said.

### **Law enforcement oversight**

Safety and security measures are a major concern for any large event, but especially for one this large.

Countless police and law enforcement agencies will be present in Eugene and the surrounding area for Oregon21, including the FBI, Oregon Department of Justice and Oregon State Police as well as the Eugene Police Department, Springfield Police Department and the Lane County Sheriff's Office, among others.

Private security likely will be present, too.

One of the first matters of business is to determine an event's "assessment rating."

The Special Event Assessment Rating, or SEAR, is determined by the Department of Homeland Security for any large-scale event in the country, such as the Superbowl, which is almost always at the top SEAR level.

Such assessment ratings are provided on a scale of one to five, with one being the highest level possible and needing the most support. Typically the higher the rating, the more federal funding and state support that could be provided.

"The rating takes into consideration the political implications of the event, dignitaries that could be present, what kind of target it poses, the number of fans and other factors," Eugene Police Capt. Eric Klinko said. "The Olympic Trials are usually rated a three, but we anticipate that the World Championships will be higher."

From there, Klinko — in conjunction with other law enforcement agency leaders, city and county staff, Oregon21, TrackTown USA and USA Track & Field staff — will work to determine exactly how it will ensure safety.

Staff from all agencies, plus some others, soon will have conversations about contingency plans and worst-case scenarios, such as forest fires, earthquakes, active shooter situations and other terrorist attacks.

Klinko said explosive detection technology units and bomb dogs likely will be present, as well as joint hazardous assessment teams, providing sweeps and monitoring for hazards at events. There will probably be plainclothes FBI agents and — depending on the climate of the world come August 2021 — armed sniper teams.

Because Eugene has hosted the Olympic Trials before, there's a level of familiarity with the event, according to Klinko, who's leading the department's planning efforts at this point.

"We've had sniper teams in place and a SWAT team at the venue since 2008," Klinko said, referring to Hayward hosting the Olympic Trials. "You're not going to see them sitting there on scope — although they have their rifles accessible. They'll primarily be stationed in 360-view area and only if the situation calls would they access their guns."

The longtime EPD officer said a sniper situation likely would not be a public spectacle.

"Nobody wants to be in a police state," he said. "But we want to have all of the capabilities should we need them. There will be a SWAT tactical team that's staged in a close-by location, so if there is a bad actor they can quickly respond."

Klinko said a "skeletal plan" is already in place for the Trials, though the new Hayward layout likely will change some details of how the event is planned and executed.

"What we want to do with 2020 (Olympic Trials) is build a plan with the new building that's scalable," Klinko said. "We know some specifics, like there will be some level of athlete village on the campus, but there's going to be a big difference between 2020 and 2021."

So, area event experts will use the 2020 Olympic Trials as a sort of test run to know what security measures need to be enhanced or changed for the World Championships.

### **Where will everyone stay?**

With hundreds of thousands of people expected to flock to Eugene and surrounding areas for the World Championships, Lane County is expected to be filled to the brim with tourists, spectators, athletes and their family and friends.

Visitors are expected to be spread out across much of the state.

The Oregon Tourism Commission, which does business as Travel Oregon, will be the lead tourism agency in charge of Oregon21, which has been categorized by organizers as a statewide event.

The semi-independent agency was created by the Oregon Legislature in 2003 to “enhance Oregonians’ quality of life by strengthening economic impacts of the state’s \$11.8 billion tourism industry.”

The World Championships typically takes place in a city larger than 1 million people, but Oregon is bucking the status quo a bit and has designated the entire region as part of the event.

The IAAF Council’s approval to officially name the championship IAAF World Championships Oregon21 is significant because it’s the first time the event name has referenced a region larger than a city, according to the Oregon21 website.

“This new approach reflects our ongoing commitment to engage broadly, not just in one community but in communities across the state and the country,” the website states.

But locally, Travel Lane County will play a large role in the organization of lodging for spectators and athletes.

Kari Westlund, the president and CEO of Travel Lane County, said Thursday that staff at the private nonprofit association are working to establish communities where people can have a home base.

She said the international nature of the event lends itself to a much larger market of opportunities, with people willing to travel for 90 minutes to two hours to get to where they’re staying during the event.

“When we went to London in 2017 (for the World Championships) we asked people what they thought about a longer commute,” Westlund said. “They said it wouldn’t be a problem at all.”

Westlund said Travel Lane County and other organizers want to fill out the area and will have no problem doing so, especially in areas along the coast and the smaller communities that surround Eugene, such as Cottage Grove,

Creswell, Oakridge and others.

“There will be some people who will want to be in Portland, and others who want to take the beautiful drive between Oakridge and Eugene,” she said.

“We’ve also had a lot of interest in Florence.”

But several thousand people also will stay in the immediate Eugene-Springfield area.

There are about 5,200 hotel rooms in Lane County, with about 4,100 located in the Eugene-Springfield area, according to Westlund. She also said there are hundreds of vacation rentals throughout the county.

“We also anticipate a good number of RV stays,” she said.

At least two new hotels will add between 160 and 180 rooms to that number.

An 82-room hotel is being constructed at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Pearl Street in downtown Eugene. The Gordon Hotel, which is an expansion of the Fifth Street Public Market, is set to be completed in September 2020, just after the Olympic Trials but before the World Championships.

Another five-story, 86-room hotel is being developed in Glenwood, according to planning documents filed with the city of Springfield. The documents show the project branded as a Tru by Hilton hotel, which would be built immediately east of its Candlewood Suites hotel along Franklin Boulevard in the western part of Glenwood.

Alpesh and Komal Patel, who own two other nearby hotels, have said they want to complete the project before the Olympic Trials.

Westlund, Klinko and several other local organizers have indicated there will be a sort of “athlete village” set up on the UO campus as a hub for athletes to experience the sporting event.

Dormitories and student housing located on campus will transform into lodging, likely for athletes and their coaches and support staff, among others.

“When (Oregon21) was bidding for the event, there were several new student complexes that were going up,” Westlund said. “We’ll likely rent out portions of their rooms, which will help us get beyond the typical hotel room setup. It’s really helpful that we have access to this space.”

UO spokeswoman Molly Blancett said the school will have 2,450 dorm rooms and 4,900 beds on campus once Bean Hall is finished being remodeled.

“While we won’t have an exact number until we know how many students will elect to live on campus that summer (they are the No. 1 priority), we expect that with athletes, officials, volunteers, media and others that every available room will be used during the championships,” Blancett said.

### **Community hosts**

Athletes from many federations are expected to arrive in Oregon and the Eugene area several days if not weeks before the Oregon21 track and field event so they can acclimate to the environment and practice in Oregon’s weather and time zone.

That gives municipalities and communities surrounding Eugene the opportunity to host different teams, in a way.

Oregon21 is creating a database of agencies, organizations and businesses that can apply to host teams at their facilities, which don’t have to be operating at a collegiate level.

People or agencies who are interested in hosting a federation can apply on the [Oregon21 website](#).

“We want to make sure that as many of those federation teams are coming in earlier and staying in our area,” said Janis Ross, the executive director of the Eugene Cascades and Coast Sports Commission at Travel Lane County. “We want to make it as convenient as possible.”

Ross said the number of athletes from each federation will vary. Some teams will have a large representation, like the United Kingdom, but some will be much smaller, Ross said.



“There may be some federations with only two or three athletes,” Ross said. “So communities don’t need to assume that a big group of athletes will necessarily be present.”

Oregon21 says that it will work with TrackTown USA to communicate with federations around the world to accommodate athletes and other team members to host them in the area.

“TrackTown USA looks forward to working with communities to take full advantage of this exciting opportunity,” the Oregon21 website states. “Let’s showcase Oregon to the rest of the world.”

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